

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A related documents processing device comprising:  
a detector detecting relevance among documents; and  
a locator locating a timewise latest document  
5 related to a document selected based on detected  
relevance information.
2. The device according to Claim 1, wherein the  
documents have header information, and the detector  
detects the relevance among the documents based on the  
10 header information.
3. The device according to Claim 2, wherein the detector  
detects a timewise order of the documents based on time  
information in the header information of each of the  
documents and outputs the relevance information including  
15 at least a timewise order.
4. The device according to Claim 1, further comprising a  
display unit for displaying contents of the document  
located by the locator.
5. The device according to Claim 4, wherein the display  
20 unit displays the relevance among the documents as a tree  
view based on the relevance information detected by the  
detector.
6. The device according to Claim 5, wherein a specific  
document selected among the documents displayed as a tree  
25 view by the display unit is processed as the selected  
document at the locator.
7. The device according to Claim 2, wherein the detector





18. The device according to Claim 15, wherein the detector detects a branched state between documents based on an ID noted in the header information according to a uniqueness rule in each of the documents and outputs the relevance information including at least the detected branched state, and the display unit displays the relevance among the documents including the detected branched state as a tree view.

19. The device according to Claim 11, wherein the documents are electronic mail documents, and the relevance information detected by the detector is an exchange history of the electronic mail documents.

20. A computer readable recording medium having a program recoded thereon, the program makes a computer function as:

- a detector detecting relevance among documents; and
- a locator locating a timewise latest document related to a document selected based on detected relevance information.

21. The recording medium according to Claim 20, wherein the documents have header information, and the detector detects the relevance among the documents based on the header information.

22. The recording medium according to Claim 21, wherein the detector detects a timewise order of the documents based on time information in the header information of

each of the documents and outputs the relevance information including at least the timewise order.

23. The recording medium according to Claim 20, wherein the program further makes the computer function as a  
5 display unit for displaying contents of the document located by the locator.

24. The recording medium according to Claim 23, wherein the display unit displays the relevance among the documents as a tree view based on the relevance  
10 information detected by the detector.

25. The recording medium according to Claim 24, wherein a specific document selected among the documents displayed as a tree view by the display unit is processed as the selected document at the locator.

15 26. The recording medium according to Claim 21, wherein the detector detects a branched state between documents based on an ID noted in the header information according to a uniqueness rule in each of the documents and outputs the relevance information including at least the detected  
20 branched state.

27. The recording medium according to Claim 24, wherein the detector detects a branched state between documents based on an ID noted in the header information according to a uniqueness rule in each of the documents and outputs  
25 the relevance information including at least the detected branched state, and the display unit displays the relevance among the documents including the detected

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documents are electronic mail documents, and the relevance information detected by the detector is an exchange history of the electronic mail documents.

39. A method for processing related documents, which  
5 comprises:

a detecting step of detecting relevance among documents; and

a locating step of locating a timewise latest document related to a document selected based on detected  
10 relevance information.

40. The method according to Claim 39, wherein the documents have header information, and the detecting step includes detecting the relevance among the documents based on the header information.

41. The method according to Claim 40, wherein the  
15 detecting step includes detecting a timewise order of the documents based on time information in the header information of each of the documents and outputting the relevance information including at least a timewise  
20 order.

42. The method according to Claim 39, the locating step includes a displaying step of displaying contents of the located document.

43. The method according to Claim 43, wherein the  
25 displaying step includes displaying the relevance among the documents as a tree view based on the relevance information detected by the detecting step.

44. The method according to Claim 43, wherein the locating step includes processing a specific document as the selected document, the specific document selected among the documents displayed as a tree view by the displaying step.

45. The method according to Claim 40, wherein the detecting step includes detecting a branched state between documents based on an ID noted in the header information according to a uniqueness rule in each of the documents and outputting the relevance information including at least the detected branched state.

46. The method according to Claim 43, wherein the detecting step includes a branched state between documents based on an ID noted in the header information according to a uniqueness rule in each of the documents and outputting the relevance information including at least the detected branched state, and the displaying step includes displaying the relevance among the documents including the detected branched state as a tree view.

47. The method according to Claim 39, wherein the documents are electronic mail documents, and the relevance information detected by the detecting step is an exchange history of the electronic mail documents.

48. The method according to Claim 47, wherein a timewise latest electronic mail document located by the locating step is subjected to a return mail processing.

49. A method for processing related documents which comprises:

a detecting step of detecting relevance among documents; and

5 a merging step of parsing an overlapped portion among related documents based on detected relevance information and merging the documents with the overlapped portion eliminated.

50. The method according to Claim 49, wherein the merging  
10 step includes merging the documents according to an order of the related documents.

51. The method according to Claim 49, wherein the documents have header information, and the detecting step includes detecting the relevance among the documents  
15 based on the header information.

52. The method according to Claim 51, wherein the detecting step includes detecting a timewise order of the documents based on time information in the header information of each of the documents and outputting the  
20 relevance information including at least the timewise order.

53. The method according to Claim 49, wherein the detecting step including displaying the relevance among the documents as a tree view based on the detected  
25 relevance information.

54. The method according to Claim 53, wherein the merging step includes merging documents from a document selected

among the documents displayed as a tree view up to a timewise latest document related to the selected document, and the displaying step includes displaying the merged document.

- 5 55. The method according to Claim 51, wherein the detecting step includes detecting a branched state between documents based on an ID noted in the header information according to a uniqueness rule in each of the documents and outputting the relevance information  
10 including at least the detected branched state.

56. The method according to Claim 53, wherein the detecting step includes detecting a branched state between documents based on an ID noted in the header information according to a uniqueness rule in each of the  
15 documents and outputting the relevance information including at least the detected branched state, and the displaying step includes displaying the relevance among the documents including the detected branched state as a tree view.

- 20 57. The method according to Claim 49, wherein the documents are electronic mail documents, and the relevance information detected by the detecting step is an exchange history of the electronic mail documents.